

STEPS TO FREEDOM: THE PROCESS OF ESCAPING ABUSE

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STEPS TO FREEDOM: THE PROCESS OF ESCAPING ABUSE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to look at factors involved in the process of women leaving abusive relationships. In two interviews of one to two hours each, each of the three women told the story of her abusive relationship. Study findings indicate that these women began abusive relationships during unstable or chaotic periods of their lives, when they were more vulnerable to manipulation. The abuse caused a distortion of reality for these women, but as soon as they were able to gain a clear view of reality, they immediately left their relationships.

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Introduction

Male violence against female intimates has been a major social problem in this country for hundreds of years, but only in the last two decades has the problem been actively studied. Many studies have focused on characteristics of the victims and their reasons for staying in the relationship, indicating an assumption that the problem lay with the women, rather than with their abusers. In spite of the obvious value judgements involved in the treatment of this problem (even in the decision to look at the problem), research in this area has typically been quantitative. More recently, the feminist approach suggests that understanding of the problem is not likely to happen without a subjective description of the experience itself (Koss, Goodman, Browne, Fitzgerald, Keita, and Russo, 1994). This study will endeavor to do just that, in addition to changing the focus from the weaknesses of the victims to their strengths.

This thesis will begin with a discussion of terms, followed by the prevalence and impact of the problem. A look at the historical background will illuminate the roots of this phenomenon and help to explain its strong relationship to social values and role expectations. Links between the effects of partner violence, the theory of learned helplessness and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder will show that, in addition to all the social barriers, there may also be important psychological reasons why women stay in abusive relationships. Next, a rationale for the current study will show the need for this type of research, followed by an explanation of qualitative research, a description of the methodology used, and finally the results of the study.

Literature Review

Defining Partner Violence

Many terms have been used to describe the type of abusive relationship in which a male adult uses violent and coercive behavior against a female intimate partner in an ongoing pattern of abuse. The research has been plagued with confusion because of the great difficulties with terminology in this area. Labels and terms with hidden or unintended connotations have a way of distorting understanding of the subject matter, and can affect research results. One standard term or definition has yet to be found, which creates a major problem for anyone attempting to research this type of violence or draw conclusions from statistics or from the various studies done (Koss et al., 1994).

Battering has been one of the most widely-used terms by psychologists for these abusive relationships, but criminal justice systems often prefer domestic violence or domestic assault. Other terms include violence against women by intimate partners, male violence against female intimates, violence against women by male partners, family violence, spouse abuse, abusive couple relationships, partner abuse, and partner violence.

Partner violence (Koss et al., 1994) will be the preferred term for purposes of this discussion, for the sake of brevity and because, although this term hints at a long term relationship which includes commitment and intimacy, it does not actually require it, nor does it require marriage. Violence is preferred to abuse because, although it is a type of abuse, violence suggests the prominent role of coercion, whether physical or psychological, which is used to remove the victim's resources and choices (Walker, 1984).

The main limitation of this term is that it cannot convey the pattern or the wide range of behaviors that are typical of this phenomenon. Also, it does not describe or even suggest the gender of the aggressor or of the victim. This lack of specificity may be a weakness, inviting assumptions and confusion. It could also be seen as a strength, however, because it does not rule out the possibility that either gender could be the aggressor, or that this kind of abuse also exists in homosexual relationships. Therefore the term could be used in future research to describe the violence in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships.

For the purposes of this research, partner violence will be defined as a male pattern of physical, sexual, or psychological abuse in a relationship in which the abuser, for the purposes of power and control over the female, engages in intense verbal criticisms, harassment, humiliation and intimidation; disregards the rights, needs, and wishes of his female partner; restrains normal activities and freedoms; and denies access to resources (Browne, 1993; Carlin, 1997; Walker, 1984).

Although there is significant work emerging on violence in homosexual relationships, the focus of this research will be limited to male to female violence in heterosexual relationships only.

There has been much debate over female to male violence and what has been termed mutual violence in some relationships. Some researchers have suggested that women's violent acts are equal to men's violent acts. Krishnan et al. (2001) found that women are 5-8 times more likely than men to be victimized by their partners, and that women make more visits to the emergency room. Jasinski and Williams (1998) report

that, overall, it appears that women's violence towards their partners does exist, but that it is very different from men's violence. The evidence suggests that men cause many more serious injuries than women cause, and that the motivation for the violence is very different as well. Men's physical violence is more likely to be motivated by attempts to dominate or terrorize a partner, while women's aggression is basically in self-defense .

Studies show that women are usually frightened by their partners when they are violent, but men are not afraid of violent female partners (Barnette and LaViolette, 1993). Domination and control of women may exist in multiple forms, such as male partners keeping them under surveillance, not permitting them to work, or limiting their access to money. No evidence in the literature describes women treating male partners in a comparable way .

The differences between male and female violence become even more obvious in research on homicides. In a study of more than 1600 homicides, almost all of the killings done by females were in self-defense, while almost none by males were in self-defense. It was found that men often find and kill partners who have left them; men plan and carry out murder-suicides; men kill their wives because they are unfaithful; men kill their wives after long periods of assault; and men kill their entire families. All these types of homicides appeared to be typical of men, but not women (Barnette and LaViolette, 1993).

Understanding Partner Violence

Some violence is known to occur in casual dating, but more partner violence seems to occur as relationships become closer and more intimate. In fact, men usually do

not become violent until after a commitment is made, when the bonds are already well established (Koss et al., 1994).

Although partner violence is usually characterized by at least one instance of physical assault, often only one or two physically violent episodes, in addition to other, more subtle forms of abuse, are sufficient to keep women in the psychological control of their partners (Walker, 1984).

Clinically based literature indicates that the need to control or dominate is a common characteristic of violent partners, therefore female independence, in their eyes, means male loss of control (Koss et al., 1994). Work and education both increase a woman's independence and financial self-sufficiency, and almost half the women studied by Riger et al. (2001) were forbidden by their partners to work. Men became angry most quickly when they felt they were about to lose control over the relationship (Koss et al., 1994). Research on dating violence showed that the males were most likely to report that their violence was to frighten the other person or force them to do something. Violence puts a quick stop to a situation that is getting out of control, also acting as an outlet for frustration. Thus violent partners may have more than one kind of gratification from the use of violence—the gratification from releasing the anger that comes from a perceived violation of male entitlement, and the gratification of maintaining dominance over the female partner (Koss et al., 1994).

Violent partners often report being out of control, stating that they did not intend to harm the victim. However, premeditation is clearly a part of many violent acts, and men often seem to be able to control their violence for certain purposes. Many violent

partners avoid beating a woman's face so that she will be able to go to work. Others limit the abuse to places on her body which will be covered by clothing. Typically, they stop just short of hurting their partners so badly that they will have to be hospitalized (Koss et al., 1994).

Both Walker (1984) and Koss and colleagues (1994) found that most researchers agree that violence is a learned behavior, and that men use it as a way of getting what they want. It seems to be a successful method, as batterer reports of their own previous life experiences show that violent behaviors have been rewarded over a long period of time (Walker, 1984). As long as it keeps working, these men will keep on using violence until someone stops them.

Psychological Abuse

Psychological abuse is an important part of partner violence, and may take many forms. This research will attempt to address psychological abuse factors as part of the pattern of partner violence. According to Browne (1993), abusive relationships may include intense criticisms and put-downs, physical attacks and intimidation, removal of normal activities and freedoms, denial of access to family, friends and resources, verbal harassment, sexual coercion and assault. After defining the term, however, Browne states that the actual focus of her discussion will be on acts of physical aggression, in spite of the fact that these and other psychological facets of emotional abuse have a huge impact on the health and well-being of women (Koss et al., 1994).

Carlin (1997) reported that victims of abuse consider the psychological and emotional dimensions of abuse to be the most devastating and damaging in the long term.

Such abuse wears away at the woman's self-esteem and self-confidence. It leaves her with a severely diminished sense of self-worth and a lack of trust in her own feelings, perceptions or abilities. It can include verbal or non-verbal behaviors intended to degrade, humiliate, undermine, frighten, isolate, and control the female partner. It can involve insults, constant criticism, belittlement and beratement, accusations stemming from jealousy and possessiveness, manipulation, and prolonged withdrawal of care and affection. Property abuse is typical, destruction of possessions which are of particular importance to the victim. Isolation from any external support system is another important factor in partner violence, as well as limiting access to money (Koss et al., 1994).

Davis (1999), Carlin (1997) and Mills (1985) all found that abused women tend to lose parts of the self after prolonged intense abuse, and that restructuring the self was an important part of gaining the ability to leave.

Prevalence

World

Few reliable statistics exist on partner violence around the world, in spite of years of efforts. The data that has been collected, however, suggests that issues are very much alike from one country to another. Not one country denied having the problem of partner violence at the fourth United Nations International Conference on Women held in China in 1994. The most recent United Nations report on the problem of violence against women world-wide indicates that it has become top priority (Walker, 1999).

National

Browne, (1993), reviewing empirical literature on the subject of partner violence, found women in America are more at risk of assault from their own partners than anyone else. They are more likely to be repeatedly attacked, raped, injured or killed than women attacked by someone other than their partners. Between 21% and 34% of all women in the United States will be physically assaulted by an intimate partner. Men assaulted women in almost 35 out of 100 couples in a period of only one year, and women experienced violence from their partners in 20% of dating couples. Dutton (1988) points out that severe repeated violence occurs in one in 14 marriages, with an average of 35 incidents before it is reported. The worst scenario of abuse ends in murder. More than half of all the women murdered in this country in the first half of the 1980's were murdered by their partners (Goodman, Koss, Fitzgerald, Russo, and Keita, 1993).

Accuracy of Statistics

In spite of the fact that different studies sometimes report differing estimates of the problem, experts agree that the problem of partner violence is extremely serious. These statistics, in fact, probably represent marked underestimates of the problem (Browne, 1993).

The national surveys which give birth to these numbers, as Browne points out, have many flaws in their sampling and interviewing methods. They typically fail to include those whose lives are especially chaotic, those who do not speak English fluently, military families living on base, and those who are hospitalized, homeless,

institutionalized, or incarcerated. Women are not included in the surveys if they do not answer the door or the phone or if they decline to speak to interviewers.

The picture is even more skewed if the women who do speak to the interviewers are not truthful because they are unwilling to report acts of violence in their relationships. This attitude would not be surprising, in view of the fact that many women tend to minimize and deny abuse. This happens for several reasons, including the desire to preserve the family unit, which is typically viewed as the responsibility of the woman. Perhaps more important is the shame and embarrassment typically felt by victims of partner violence (Walker, 1979). Another factor may be the fact that bonds in an abusive relationship can be very strong; psychosocial factors can bind a victim to her batterer like miracle glue (Walker, 1979).

Many women seek to protect their partners out of loyalty, but others may simply be afraid of retaliation; even if their partners are not nearby, a stranger's promise of anonymity may not be enough to dispel their fears (Koss et al., 1994). It is especially difficult to get information on sexual assault in intimate relationships. Pagelow (1984) reported that women in his sample described sexual aggression by their partners so severe that they were injured or lost consciousness, yet they did not define these acts as sexual assaults.

It is impossible to make meaningful generalizations from the studies on minority populations because they are so incomplete. Much of the research on partner violence has used data from police, the court system, and hospitals. These sources do not provide

accurate data for intergroup comparisons because individuals of low socioeconomic status are typically overrepresented (Coley and Beckett, 1988).

Impact

Women's temporary physical injuries from partner violence range from bruises, cuts and black eyes to strained or torn ligaments, concussions, broken bones, and miscarriages. Injuries to the head, face, neck and abdomen are typical. Permanent injuries include joint damage, partial loss of hearing or vision, scars from burns, bites or knife wounds, and death (Koss et al., 1994).

During recovery, many survivors of partner violence have depression and apathy and are still rather withdrawn and passive. They often have symptoms of chronic fatigue, tension, intense startle reactions, medical symptomatology, and disturbed sleeping and eating patterns. They find it difficult to make basic decisions or function alone, and they may be suggestible and dependent. These responses to partner violence closely parallel reactions of survivors across a variety of traumatic events (Koss, et al., 1994).

Long term psychological effects include fearfulness, anxiety, confusion, anger, guilt, shame, vulnerability, self blame, feelings of powerlessness, a sense of failure, and a sense of being worthless. Survivors of partner violence often have phobias, depression, hostility, somatic symptoms, and a mistrust of others that can damage personal relationships and functioning (Koss et al., 1994).

Many impact studies do not consider the effect on the children who witness partner violence, but one summary of 29 studies of these children indicates that many areas of functioning are damaged, including behavioral, emotional, social, cognitive, and

physical. Behavioral problems include tantrums, aggression, cruelty to animals, delinquency, and attention deficit disorder/hyperactivity .

Common emotional problems are anxiety, anger, depression, and low self esteem. These children often have to deal with poor social skills, peer rejection and problems in school. Physical problems include failure to thrive, difficulty in sleeping and eating, poor motor skills, and psychosomatic symptoms like eczema and bed wetting. Researchers are uncertain, however, if these problems can be attributed to partner violence alone or to the combination of exposure to violence along with other problems which may be prevalent in violent homes (Jasinski and Williams, 1998).

Children five and younger may be exposed to violence more than any other group, and they may be especially vulnerable to it. Infants are aware of the emotional states of others at an early age, and may be disturbed by the turmoil of a violent household. Toddlers and preschoolers may be even more disturbed by the chaos of a violent home. Two to five-year-olds exposed to partner violence often behave aggressively, and may become very demanding. They may become whiny or clingy, have trouble sleeping, and be anxious or sad. Some researchers see children of this age, because of their egocentrism, to be most likely to feel responsible for the trouble between their parents (Jasinski and Williams, 1998).

Perhaps the most significant and long lasting effect on children is the lessons they take with them into adulthood. A primary risk factor for becoming involved in partner violence as an adult (both males and females) is exposure to it in childhood. One third of

the children who come from violent homes eventually become violent themselves (Koss et al., 1994).

In addition to all the problems experienced by individuals who are victims and witnesses of partner violence, the social community suffers heavy damages as well, both in financial expenses and moral values. The estimated yearly medical cost of partner violence comes to \$1.3 billion, while the yearly cost to the criminal justice system is estimated at \$67 billion (Jasinski and Williams, 1998).

Koss et al. (1994) cites van der Kolk (1987), who found that partner violence causes all family members to become extremely reliant on denial, avoidance, and alternate definitions of traumatic events. Some members learn to sacrifice themselves or others to maintain the family secret. They learn to blame the victim and to accept that violence is inevitable. They learn to respond with various behaviors, from inertia and withdrawal to paranoia and rage. Partner violence provides a social environment which teaches lessons that the perpetrators, victims, and witnesses all learn before passing them on to the next generation.

Sociocultural Roots

Understanding the problem of partner violence requires the study of not only individual characteristics and psychopathology, but also the sociocultural context in which the phenomenon occurs. From the individual to cultural institutions to the whole of society, there are many levels of influence that could cause this violent behavior (Koss et al., 1994). All of them, however, occur in an atmosphere created by the sexist, patriarchal structure of Western society (Schechter, 1982).

Western civilization has given approval, both legal and social, to wife-beating since ancient times (Taub, 1983, and Walker, 1984). Wives in ancient Rome were required to obey their husbands (Dobash and Dobash, 1978, and Martin, 1987). Husbands had the legal and moral right to control their wives and punish them when they misbehaved (Stedman, 1917), which included killing them when necessary (Hirschel and Hutchinson, 1992). Wives and children were in the same category as slaves, with men having the power of life and death over them all (Hilberman, 1980, and Martin 1987). In fact, the word family is descended from the Roman familia, which referred to all of a man's slaves (Hilberman, 1980, and Martin, 1987).

When the Church came into power, detailed rights and powers of husbands over their wives were written into religious laws (Davidson, 1977, and Dobash and Dobash, 1978). During the 12th century, the first systematic document of church law, the Decretum, emphasized that men were made in the image of God, but women were not (Davidson, 1977).

It is not surprising that cultural attitudes with such deep roots would be difficult to change. In 1979, Walker found that a patriarchal society which facilitates, possibly even encourages, men to beat their partners, still exists. Koss and associates (1994) observed that violence serves as a social control of women, preserving the dominance of men and the subordination of women. They showed how cultural beliefs in a male-dominated society support rape, sexual harassment, and partner assault—even partner murder.

After nine years of studying partner violence, Walker (1984) concluded that the best way to change violent relationships would be to change the structure of society.

Risk Markers

Many theories of causation in the past have focused on recurrent themes in personality profiles of the victim, which may suggest the attitude that researchers should be trying to find out what it is about these women that causes men to abuse them. These personality profiles tend to emphasize negative or pathological features of victims, and may become instruments for victim-blaming. Many researchers and theorists have commonly taken the stance of victim-blaming, attempting to explain why an individual woman is battered (Koss et al., 1994).

Current literature has tended to assume that the high rates of mental disorder found in victims of partner violence are a result of the violence in their relationships (Kessler, Molnar, Feurer, and Applebaum, 2001). Testing the possibility that some preexisting mental disorders might be risk factors for later involvement in partner violence, Kessler et al. (2001) analyzed general population data from the National Comorbidity Survey (NCS) to evaluate this possibility. Of the 8,098 people surveyed, 3,537 were cohabiting or married adults. The study found that there was no strong overall pattern of associations between a premarital history of mental disorder and female victimization. It is interesting to note that the study also found that premarital mental disorders of men do predict subsequent partner violence.

Sociodemographic correlates of partner violence were also analyzed from the NCS data, including age, gender, race-ethnicity, education and family income, region of the country, urban, suburban or rural residence, and marital status. The associations are consistently stronger for female than male reporters. Female reports show that the odds of

partner violence are significantly higher among Blacks and Hispanics than non-Hispanic Whites and among cohabiting rather than married couples. Risk is higher in first marriages than remarriages, and in marriages at younger ages. Female reports also suggest that increased age, education, and family income related to decreased incidence of violence. The associations based on male reports are generally more modest in magnitude than those based on female reports. There was no association between partner violence and regions of the country, or between urban, suburban, or rural residence. It should be noted that childhood experiences of witnessing violence in the family are strong predictors of later adult partner violence, and it does not seem to matter whether the violence is minor or severe (Kessler et al., 2001).

Current literature agrees that most of the symptomatology ascribed to abused women could be seen as resulting from the abuse, rather than preceding it (Carlin, 1997). Also contradicting theories that focus on the personality profile of the abused woman, Barnette and LaViolette (1993) suggest that any woman could get trapped in an abusive relationship.

Walker (1984) found that a common characteristic for both partners in a violent relationship was a belief in the traditional gender-role stereotypes. In her earlier study on partner violence, Walker (1979) discovered that the abused women had fathers who also believed in traditional gender roles, treating their daughters like fragile flowers. By internalizing these stereotypical gender roles, the women learned that they needed to be dependent on men because they were incompetent. However, Walker (2002) was not able to confirm her hypothesis that battered women would demonstrate more traditional

gender role socialization than non-battered women. She did find a significant relationship between a history of child abuse and recent abuse in an adult romantic relationship.

Walker (1979) found that, through early childhood socialization, some men learn that violent behavior is a good way to get what they want. Most of the battering men in her study watched their fathers beat their mothers when they were children. Sometimes they were beaten also, and often were emotionally deprived. Almost half of the victims studied had witnessed partner abuse in childhood as well. Hilbert et al. (2001) illustrated the predictive nature of abusers and victims witnessing spousal abuse as children, as well as the violent partner's history of abuse with other adults.

Johnson (2001) found correlates between insecure attachments in childhood and later involvement in partner violence. Walker (2000) also found a significant relationship between early childhood problems with parental attachments and later victimization in violent relationships. She also found that 85% of the battered women in her study reported being abused as a child.

Koss and colleagues (1994) found that, in 52 studies conducted over a period of 15 years, only one risk marker (out of 97) was consistent for victims of partner abuse as well as for abusers. That risk marker was witnessing partner abuse as children. Nevertheless, the most influential characteristic of a victim of partner violence remains that of being female (Koss et al., 1994).

Why Do They Stay?

Walker (1984) found that the theoretical concept called learned helplessness could be adapted to explain why women find it so difficult to escape a violent partner. Martin

Seligman (1975) formulated this psychosocial theory from the results of experiments with dogs and other lab animals. They administered a series of electrical shocks at random and varied intervals. The animals quickly learned that they could not control the shocks, no matter what response they made.

After a while they ceased any further voluntary activity and became compliant, passive and submissive. When the researchers then tried to teach the animals that they could escape by moving to the other side of the cage, there was no response. Even when the cage door was left open and they were shown the way out, the animals remained passive, refusing to try to leave the cage or to avoid the shock. After repeatedly being dragged to the exit, they were finally able to learn to respond voluntarily again. The earlier in life the animals learned that they had no control over the painful shocks, the longer it took to overcome this learned helplessness, although it did eventually disappear.

In a similar experiment, newborn rats were held in the researcher's hand until they stopped squirming and trying to escape, then they were released. This was repeated several times. Next they were placed in a vat of water. Rats who had not been taught to be passive were able to swim up to 60 hours, but the rats who had been held drowned within 30 minutes, some not even attempting to swim at all. Originally they all had the ability to learn how to swim, but the ones who had learned that they had no control over their situation were unable to respond, even to save their lives (Walker, 1984).

Another explanation of the psychological results of violence concerns Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). More and more research now suggests that many survivors of partner violence suffer from PTSD (Koss et al, 1994). In the Diagnostic and

Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (1994), fourth edition, PTSD is classified as an anxiety disorder, produced by an unusual, extremely stressful event (assault, military combat, death camp, etc.) in which the victim a) reexperiences the trauma in painful memories or dreams; b) has diminished responsiveness, or numbing, with loss of interest in significant activities, and feelings of detachment and estrangement from others; and c) exaggerated startle response, disturbed sleep, difficulty in focusing or remembering, guilt about surviving when others did not, and avoidance of things that are a reminder of the traumatic event.

Walker (1991) suggests that the extreme traumatic stressors required for the diagnosis of PTSD are a normal part of the lives of victims of partner violence. The most extreme category, catastrophic events, includes forced captivity, as in a concentration camp or hostage situation. Walker notes that women who have been psychologically tortured or held captive by their partners because of extreme violence and threat would be included in this category.

Amnesty International, in an attempt to objectively define the psychological torture used on prisoners of war and hostages, names the following eight categories of abuse: (1) isolation of the victims; (2) exhaustion produced by limited food or interrupted sleep patterns; (3) monopolization of perception including obsession and possessiveness; (4) threats such as death of self, family and friends, sham executions, and other vague threats; (5) degradation, including humiliation, denial of victim's powers, and verbal name calling; (6) drug or alcohol administration; (7) altered states of consciousness produced through hypnotic states; and (8) occasional indulgences at

random and variable times to keep hope alive. The battered women in Walker's study (1984) all reported having experienced all eight forms of torture.

Both PTSD and learned helplessness are seen in victims of partner violence, and may result in a cluster of thought patterns, feelings, and behaviors that constitute the battered woman syndrome (Barnette and LaViolette, 1993). A construct of L.E. Walker, the battered woman syndrome became one of the most influential theories in the late 1970's and 1980's in explaining women's reactions to violent male partners (Koss et al., 1994). Walker saw the syndrome as a severe stress reaction, a subcategory of PTSD (Walker and LaViolette, 1993). The syndrome is described as a pattern of psychological consequences that develops in the victims of violent relationships as the violence gradually becomes more serious, uncontrollable, and unpredictable. Walker's application of the concept of learned helplessness is typically viewed as the core feature of the battered woman syndrome (Koss et al., 1994).

The fear and paralysis typical of this syndrome may offer the answer to why women stay with violent men. Basic personality components of the syndrome include fear, depression, guilt, passivity, and low self-esteem (Barnette and LaViolette, 1993). Koss et al. (1994) notes that Walker views the battered woman syndrome as a situationally based construct rather than a character disorder. Learned helplessness, reexperiencing the trauma, intrusive recollections, generalized anxiety, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal are all included in this syndrome as the effects of violence.

Walker's concepts of the battered woman syndrome and learned helplessness have helped to answer many questions about violent partner relationships; nevertheless,

these concepts have been criticized by many. Some researchers claim that these constructs put too much weight on individual psychology to explain why women stay with violent partners, rather than pointing to social forces as the cause. Critics have suggested that these women only seem helpless because of the reality of inadequate resources available to them, from police protection to opportunities for employment. Others have noted that, in view of the real physical dangers involved in leaving the abusive partner (this is when the most serious injuries occur), the choice to stay shows common sense rather than helplessness (Koss et al., 1994).

Another major theory generated by Walker's research (1979) is the Walker Cycle Theory of Violence. Walker found that the three phases in a recurring battering cycle were tension building, the acute battering incident, and loving contrition.

A gradual escalation of tension marks the first phase, with the batterer using intentional behaviors such as name-calling to increase the friction. Although critical and hostile, the batterer does not yet express himself in an extreme or explosive form. The woman tries not to further aggravate him, doing things to please him and calm him down. She often succeeds for a short time, reinforcing her belief that she can do something to improve the situation. It becomes part of the pattern of being unable to predict or influence the outcome, leading to learned helplessness. The tension continues to escalate until eventually she is unable to influence his angry behavior at all. At this point she usually withdraws from the batterer, exhausted from the constant stress and afraid that she will accidentally set off an explosion. He responds by becoming more abusive. Without intervention, the acute battering incident (the second phase) becomes inevitable.

Sometimes the stress of waiting for it becomes unbearable, and she may try to provoke the attack at a place and time that might lessen the danger of serious injury.

In phase two, the batterer typically attacks with a barrage of both verbal and physical aggression. If the police are called at all, it is during this phase. The phase is over when the batterer stops, bringing a sharp reduction in tension. The relief at the reduction in tension serves as a natural reinforcer to the violence.

Phase three provides positive reinforcement for the woman to remain in the relationship. There is no tension in this phase, and the batterer may apologize, show kindness and love, even shower her with gifts. He typically promises it will never happen again, which may renew her hope that he will change. At this point, he may be suffering such remorse that he actually believes that he will not let it happen again.

Over the course of a violent relationship, the tension phase becomes more pronounced, and the loving contrition phase declines (Walker, 1984). Dutton (1993) pointed out that not all women in violent relationships experience this intermittent cycle, that many report a constant state of siege with little relief from the terror.

In addition to the learned helplessness phenomenon, women may also learn that they are powerless against men through early and ongoing socialization (Walker, 1979). They are told that they are not only unable to care for themselves, but that they cause their men to become violent with them. Carlin (1997) found that women in violent relationships tend to accept their partner's perceptions and meanings. Clinical studies have consistently noted that abused women internalize these derogatory attributions and blame for the violence against them (Koss et al., 1994).

In addition to, or perhaps because of, stereotyped gender roles, there are many factors which provide barriers to women leaving violent relationships. Economic dependence can be a major factor, as well as societal indifference. The court system seems reluctant to punish the men; religious advisors tell women to go home and take care of their obligations; often even a woman's own family will advise her to try to keep the marriage together (Walker, 1979). In addition to unresponsive communities, considerable evidence supports the findings that leaving actually increases the physical danger to women (Hamby, 1998; Koss et al., 1994).

Leaving

Davis (2002) found that no one factor was a key to terminating abusive relationships. Nevertheless, the women in the study validated that social support systems and intuition were important factors enabling them to eventually leave the abuse. More than one source of support is often needed to facilitate escaping abuse. The timing involved in escaping abuse is very important, but the best time to leave is probably best understood only by the abused women herself.

Davis (2002) discovered that premonitions of immanent danger often enabled women to run before the episode happened. Even though the women in the study were unable to identify anything different about the situation at the time they left, an intuitive sense of something threatening activated their leaving. This sixth sense seemed to have the most impact on immediate escape, in spite of the fact that the study was unable to explain it.

Perceiving abused women as the experts on their circumstances is extremely important in developing effective strategies of helping them. Validating her intuition and decisions and affirming her strengths may be the most significant interventions many people around her can offer (Davis, 2002).

Landenburger (1989) found that the characteristics of the relationship influenced women's perceptions and choices and identified a process of entrapment and recovery with four phases of binding, enduring, disengaging, and recovering. Only when abused women are validated by the people around them are they able to fully and accurately assess the relationship and therefore end it.

Mills (1985) identified five stages of change that affect women during abuse: entering the relationship, managing the violence, experiencing a loss of self, re-evaluating the relationship, and restructuring the self.

Citing Ulrich (1991), Wuest and Merritt-Gray (1999) noted that most of the women in that study described the importance of personal growth factors as being critical to leaving. Ulrich (1991) found that leaving was a process that occurred over time, and that personal growth and change was just as significant a reason for leaving as was safety. Wuest and Merritt-Gray (1999) discovered that one of the strategies which facilitated leaving an abusive relationship was a woman enhancing her own capabilities by becoming more involved in activities which help her to feel good about herself and her abilities. The central social psychological process for a woman successfully leaving an abusive relationship, however, is reclaiming self. The four stages of this cyclical process

are counteracting abuse, breaking free, not going back, and moving on, with each stage possibly lasting for years.

Rationale

Due to years of research, awareness of the prevalence of the problem of partner violence has greatly increased, as has understanding of some of the dimensions of the problem. There have been few studies done, however, on the women who have successfully left abusive situations, or on the process involved in leaving (Carlin, 1997).

Because of this lack of research, very little is known about how women free themselves from abuse, the complex steps they go through, or how they find the strength to leave in spite of social and economic obstacles and ongoing problems of fear and low self-esteem.

For the purpose of understanding, theoretical insight, and more effective intervention, research literature has identified a need to describe the subjective experiences of women in violent relationships (Carlin, 1997).

Walker (1984) points out that it is important and necessary to include the women's views because their descriptions of the violence are the most accurate. They may deny or minimize, but they rarely exaggerate. Reading their stories in their own words more effectively conveys the negative impact of this type of violence, and it also allows women to explain their experiences in the full context of the violence (Giles-Sims, 1998).

Describing the subjective stories of women's experiences in their own words falls into the category of feminist research, which will be defined here as research which

strives to overcome the traditional hierarchical, unequal approach, emphasizing instead conscious partiality and a collaborative, equitable relationship between researcher and researched which is empowering for both parties. Research with a feminist perspective seeks out women's experiences, ideas and needs, emphasizing their value and validity (Carlin, 1997). For this type of study, Giles-Sims (1998) suggests that a qualitative analysis can lead to a better understanding of the complexities and meanings, and may be more suitable than a quantitative analysis.

Using unstructured or semi-structured interviews, a researcher can explore women's views of reality and build theory. The qualitative process complements quantitative, closed-ended interview research, which attempts to test existing hypotheses.

Many feminists have used semi-structured interviews to actively involve their respondents because it gives free interaction between the researcher and the respondent, offering opportunities to clarify and discuss concepts, while structured interviews or surveys do not. Open-ended questions also lend themselves to the study of process, which is an important focus of this study. Open-ended interview studies often rely on the grounded theory approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1969) for data analysis, which includes the analysis of process.

The research question for this study is: What are some of the common factors that facilitate the process of a woman freeing herself from a male partner's violence? In order to facilitate a more accurate understanding of all the phases of the complex phenomenon of leaving violence behind, it is important to view the act of ending the abusive situation as a dynamic and evolving process, rather than one single, static event.

This researcher used two semi-structured interviews and the grounded theory approach for a qualitative analysis of the data. It is a limited replication and extension of Carlin's study (1997) which describes the experiences of five women who successfully ended abusive relationships. These women were interviewed about one to two years after leaving their violent partners. Carlin calls for more studies of this type. This study answers that call.

This thesis contributes to the knowledge base by helping to deepen and enhance understanding of the complex process of leaving abuse behind. It is hoped that all abused women may be helped by this increased understanding, as well as professionals and others in a position to support women in their efforts to free themselves from abuse.

This research is intended to benefit the women who are interviewed by helping them to develop trust in their own voices and to gain insight and perspective on their experiences, as well as to provide a sense of closure and facilitate the healing process. In an effort to ultimately end partner violence, this study contributes to the knowledge base in both clinical and theoretical realms, offering an alternate way of understanding women's process in escaping violence and abuse.

Methods

This section will cover the various problems in finding participants for the study and the methods used to collect data. A discussion of the data analysis will be followed by the methods for verification.

Participants

One participant was a client of the Women's Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), one was a client of the Interior Alaska Center for Nonviolent Living (commonly referred to locally as IAC), and one was a personal friend of mine.

IAC offers counseling, support groups, and emergency short-term shelter accommodations for women and children who are victims of partner violence. The original plan was to select all participants from a list of volunteers recommended by the advocates working at IAC, a list of 21-30 year-old women, with incomes of \$30,000 or less, who had children under 18 and who had left their abusive partners within the last six months. Most of these parameters had to be dropped. Not only were there problems finding women with that list of attributes, six months is a very short time for healing from this type of violence, and most women were nowhere near ready to reflect on traumatic memories—especially not with a stranger.

There was only one IAC client willing to participate in the research. She had children, and she almost matched the income requisite, but she was 46 years old, and she had left her relationship almost two years before. She became the first participant, but only after the age brackets, the time since leaving the relationship, and the income levels were all broadened.

Advertising by word of mouth brought another name and phone number from the Women's Center at UAF—someone who hoped that telling her story might save other women from the abuse she had experienced. She was the right age and income level, but her abusive relationship had only lasted less than two years, she had no children, and she

had left the relationship six years before. The search criteria had to be widened again to include her.

This second volunteer turned out to be the one who had the best ability and willingness to reflect, identify, and explore the meanings and significant aspects of her experiences. She had no qualms at all about remembering or discussing every detail of her relationship.

My own personal friend turned out to be the third participant. She had offered to be interviewed from the beginning of the research, but I had not accepted her because she was 47 and she had left her relationship 17 years previously. The age criteria had already been broadened, so only the "time since leaving" had to be changed again before she could be accepted (it was dropped entirely). The criteria finally solidified into: women 30-47 years old with income levels of \$30,000 or less, who had been in relationships for at least 18 months in which abuse had occurred.

In spite of the obvious differences between the participants, the degree of violence in each relationship seemed to have similar effects on each woman. The second participant was the youngest, only 30 years old, but she seemed to have the most insight into the psychological aspects of her relationship, probably because she spent a lot of time in counseling after she left the relationship. All the important aspects that she spoke about seemed to show up for the other two women, as well.

Data Collection

In my initial contact with the volunteers, I described the study and what it would require from them in terms of time and effort. I addressed the benefits and the risks, and

we discussed possible emotional discomforts and their freedom to take breaks or withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty. Because of the risk of emotional retraumatization while recalling past abusive experiences, I offered several sources of counseling and support, including myself and the IAC, where an advocate is available for counseling 24 hours a day. The women signed the informed consent forms (see Appendix A) which named the benefits and risks of participation.

There were two semi-structured, tape-recorded interviews with each participant, each lasting one to two hours. The Interview Guide (Appendix B) helped maintain a general focus in the interviews, but questions were sometimes added during the process, based on emerging concepts and evolving theoretical analysis. The interviews were flexible and open to spontaneous dialogue, with the participants themselves deciding which topics were most important.

Before the first interview started, each woman filled out a form on demographics and information on family of origin. At the end of each interview, I checked for any negative effects using a list of questions (see Appendix E) which explored the overall experience of each subject during the research process. The interviews were conducted at places of the individual participant's choosing, where privacy and confidentiality were assured. Two were held at a participant's dormitory room at UAF, two were held at the home of the researcher, and two were held at a meeting room at Mary Siah Recreation Center.

Confidentiality was maintained both during the research and in the final presentation of findings. Tapes and transcripts were labeled with fictitious names. Data

was kept in the personal locked files of the researcher while in use. Transcripts were then stored in a secure place on the UAF campus, and tapes were destroyed.

The first woman, who will go by the fictitious name of “Annie” in this research, was somewhat reticent in the interviews, especially the first one. She was quite enmeshed in a custody dispute, and her energy throughout the interviews was focused on keeping her children happy and safe, especially from their father. She lived out of town, and several months went by between her first and her second interviews, partly because of her busy schedule and partly because of transportation problems.

At first Annie described only one physically violent incident in the relationship, but later mentioned many small incidents which took place over the 26 year relationship, in addition to the ongoing emotional and verbal abuse. Still, Annie was the least physical abused of the three women.

“Bonnie,” the second participant, was abused by her husband for less than two years, but the violence was extreme. She sought counseling help for her PTSD symptoms, which finally went away just this year—six years after she left the relationship. Bonnie was the most able to analyze, interpret and clarify her experiences, probably because she had already spent many hours on analysis during counseling. Her insight was a great help in the interpretation and analysis of the interviews of the other two women.

The third volunteer, “Charlotte,” had been severely traumatized from the abuse during her 12 year relationship, in spite of the fact that she had left the relationship 17 years earlier. After the first interview, she had frightening nightmares, causing her to put off the second interview for several months. Because of her reaction to the first interview,

I was more careful during the second interview to avoid the topics which were most traumatic for her. Charlotte admitted she was still unable to deal with some of the memories from the relationship.

Data Analysis

When using the quantitative approach to data analysis, researchers collect data to explain or prove preconceived models or theories. The nature of this process is deductive (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). When the qualitative approach is used, however, the researcher begins with raw data, then discovers the concepts and insights which are inherent in the raw data. These concepts then lead to the construction of the resulting theory. The nature of the qualitative process is inductive. In order to be sure that a set of concepts, as well as the resulting theory, is grounded in the original data, validation is built into each step of analysis and sampling (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

An empirical analysis, whether quantitative or qualitative, requires that the data be analyzed for its properties, in order to describe the various parts and their dimensions. This qualitative analysis involved three processes: open coding, breaking down the data to identify relevant categories; axial coding, refining, developing and relating those categories along a common axis; and selective coding, tying together core categories to form unifying theories or propositions.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) described the procedure of data analysis as beginning with careful, word for word transcription of the interview, then breaking down and taking apart each sentence or paragraph. After several readings, significant ideas within the text were labeled with some word or phrase that seemed to capture the concept being

presented by the speaker. Single phrases, paragraphs and even entire pages were coded in this way (see Codebook, Appendix G). The text was then sorted by concept.

Axial coding is the process of relating sub-categories (concepts) to a category. In this phase of analysis, each category, or phenomenon, is developed in terms of the conditions that give rise to it, the specific dimensional location of this phenomenon in terms of its properties, the action/interactional strategies used to manage this phenomenon in light of its context, and the consequences of the action/interaction that is taken (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

The understanding of process is an important component of this study. Process is defined by Strauss and Corbin as action and interaction over time in response to certain conditions (which may also change over time). In this study, it would mean the actions and interactions over time between the participants and their abusive partners, as well as between the participants and their families, or professionals with whom they had contact, such as counselors or policemen. The conditions would be the various types of abuse and other conditions to which the participants were responding.

Axial coding stimulates thinking about how conditions and consequences relate to each other and to the process. In axial coding, the search continues for additional properties of each category and the dimensional location of each event.

Selective coding was used to organize categories around a main theme, or central concept, resulting in the development of the analytic storyline. This process provided the inductive derivation of theories that were grounded in the context of the data. It occurred over time, and did not really end until the final writing.

Methods for Verification

To make sure that all concepts or categories were empirically grounded in the actual data, ongoing results of the analysis were constantly compared to the data, the narratives of the interviewed women. In addition, the participants themselves, as co-researchers, were offered the opportunity to read the transcripts and interpretations of the interviews for validation or modification. The final results of the study were then presented to the participants for a final validation.

Findings

Certain key events were present in each woman's story. The first event was either the history of abuse in the family of origin or a current chaotic emotional setting for each woman which accompanied or predated the beginning of the abusive relationship. An important facet of this setting was each woman's tendency to view the man as being wiser or more knowledgeable than she was, defining a hierarchy of the relationship. The second key event was the physical violence, which seemed to continually escalate, and was always surrounded by verbal and emotional abuse which tended to distort reality. There were a variety of barriers which prevented escaping the abuse, but finally, a clearly defined event enabled each woman to gain a clear view of reality, leading immediately to freedom from the abuse.

History/Emotional Setting

Bonnie felt that a woman's instability and low self esteem make her vulnerable to abusive relationships:

...I don't think you can get involved in any of those [violent] relationships if you don't already have...low self esteem,...or if you're...in a situation where your life's...steady and stable and you know who you are....We're always raised to believe that Prince Charming's going to come save us when we're in trouble, but I think in reality if you're wounded and you're out in the open, it's not Prince Charming, it's some kind of shark that's going to come up and take advantage of that weakness.

This issue of low self esteem or instability was present at the beginning of all three relationships. Annie's father died when she was five years old, and her mother never remarried. She had been dating John, who was nine years older than she was, when her mother became fatally ill. She died the summer before Annie's senior year in high school, "so we got married that fall." In a debriefing interview, she said that it had been a very chaotic time for her. "I was very unstable."

It was a chaotic time for Bonnie, too, when she met Bill, "just a very tumultuous time in my life..., and I was...trying to figure out what I was going to do...next. Then...this guy that I met...came in and started telling me all the answers that I wanted to hear. I basically...listened to whatever he said...."

Violence came early in Charlotte's life. Her father was physically and verbally abusive to her mother and the children as well. "All our codependent behavior started out young, being afraid [sic] of what was walking through the door, and how we were going to have to kow-tow down and make his life nice when he walked in the door. And that's how it starts...."

Later, as an adult, she was told that she had a terminal blood clot disorder. She did not expect to live through the surgery for two blood clots, but she did. About a year after the surgery, she fell deeply in love with Frank. He was 16 years older than she was, so she “just thought he had more knowledge.”

Each relationship began when the woman was in a chaotic or unstable emotional setting (in addition to one woman’s family history of violence). Each woman believed that her “Prince Charming” was wiser or more knowledgeable—that he “had all the answers.”

Abuse and Distortion of Reality

A certain type of verbal abuse sandwiched each violent episode, causing two of the three women (the two who were most violently abused) to feel that their own stupid mistakes had caused their husbands to become violent. They thought that if they told anyone about the abuse, they would have to tell how they had caused it to happen.

Bonnie tried to explain how she had accepted the blame for the violence. Even before the violence started, when they argued, “I always felt like it was my fault...because he told me it was....I really didn’t have...good self-esteem at that point.” The violence began after they moved in together, when he slapped her and “told me that he couldn’t be married to me, that I was crazy. I felt like, ‘Oh, my God, I can’t lose this guy that I’ve totally idealized in my head as being...Adonis.’ So I was...scrambling to please him...”

I wanted to prove I wasn’t nuts...and that I was worthy....When they hit you, they’re also saying things that deal with your insecurities; they’re pointing out all

your flaws....I felt ashamed for other people to find out.... In order to deal with the fact that he's hitting me, I also have to confront all these other things which are very ambiguous, very troublesome—my own fears. Am I good enough to be in a relationship?"

The relationship moved quickly. They were married in March, "and then in April he almost killed me."

He had been strangling me in the kitchen... the more I struggled, the harder he would hold on.... 'This is it. This is my final...moment,' and I stared at the kitchen floor, and I went limp. And it was at that point, when I stopped fighting, that he let go, thank God.

She ran to the door and was almost able to get through it when suddenly:

He picked me up and threw me across the room....I just remember laying [sic] on the ground and looking up at him....My hair was in my eyes, and I was looking through my hair, and I just knew... 'If I move now, I will never move again!' And so I laid [sic] there...maybe 20, 30 minutes....

And then he finally picked me up and put me on the sofa, put a cigarette in my mouth, started to be concerned about my eye, because I had a bruise, and then sat there and told me that I had flipped over his arm, and ... how he would never hurt me, and that everything that happened I had just imagined. And he did this for a LONG time. When they beat you and brainwash you—it's the same thing!...

Here's someone telling you that your sense experience is not real—you're so...out of it for being beaten that you don't even know what to think....He'd sit

me on the sofa, not let me go to sleep, and just continue to be telling me something....I couldn't comprehend what he was saying half the time....So that was the first time he had done that little ritual, which he would repeat in our relationship.... but we made up, and it was like...that high you go on when everything's good.

Bonnie described some of the other methods her husband used during the relationship to distort reality for her.

He really screwed with my head to the point where I wasn't sure of anything. He would tell me that I would do things that I had no memory of doing, so I thought I was going insane, and it was a very, very, scary feeling. He had me convinced that I had some kind of sleeping disorder....He told me that I would get up in my sleep, and that one time I took a fork and stabbed him...

Charlotte's experiences with abuse and blame were similar. She also accepted her partner's distortion of reality when she was blamed for the violence. Her relationship "started out very loving when we were dating....He was so good to me!...It was great! I always thought that if anything went wrong after that...it was my fault!..." Then the violence began.

In the beginning I was shell-shocked. I didn't know what happened. I didn't understand what was going on. It started out with arguing....He would be very unhappy with ... something that happened,....but it would be directed like it was my fault. And if I stood up to him, argued back with him,...then violence would just happen, and he would hurt me bad....

Annie talked about only one seriously violent episode with her husband, about six years into the marriage, when he choked her in a jealous rage. There were many other small incidents of physical violence, which did not really frighten her, during her 26 year relationship, although she admitted that she had tried to minimize the abuse as a coping mechanism. Verbal and emotional abuse were ongoing throughout the relationship. In a final validation of the findings, Annie added that her husband had also “definitely” distorted reality for her.

A particularly important factor in a more complete understanding of this type of abuse is the extent to which the perpetrator engaged in distortion of his partner’s understanding of the nature of the abuse. The verbal criticism began first, causing the women to believe that their stupid mistakes were causing problems in the relationship. After a violent explosion, the verbal abuse would be repeated, emphasizing for the women that they were the cause. The men would often use cognitive manipulations which made the women wonder if they were going crazy, such as denying the women’s sense experiences.

Barriers

Various kinds of barriers made it difficult for the women to escape the abuse. The lack of money and other resources presented serious difficulties, but intense emotional commitments also kept them there with their partners. Even after the first violent episode, each woman hoped that the problems in the relationship could be worked out. The longer each relationship went on, however, the more difficult it became to leave, partly because

of the kinds of barriers that society has found so difficult to understand, a complex system of emotional bars built by the verbal and emotional abuse.

Bonnie believed her husband when he told her that her own flaws had caused the violence. “I was afraid I was not good enough, and I thought that all the crap he said about me was true. Whatever insecurities I had, he knew, and pulled them out, and used them against me....”

Shame caused all the women to try to keep the violence a secret. “The humiliation of being beat—it’s...something that you just don’t feel like sharing with people,” Bonnie admitted. Charlotte still has problems telling people about the abuse. “I just didn’t ever like looking at it or sharing it with others,...or being judged....I hated that...Just don’t tell anyone. It’s safer. That’s what I’ve done for years.” Late in the relationship, Charlotte would lie to hospital personnel to avoid further injury....When she admitted to being beaten, “then they brought the law in, and when I went home, it would be worse for me...” Even Annie, who said she never really felt responsible for the abuse, said, “I didn’t want anyone to know....I guess I was kind of embarrassed.”

Self blame was inextricably linked to shame, which kept the women isolated. As long as the abuse was a secret, the women had no support from friends, family, or society. They had no one to give them a second opinion on what was happening, no one to disagree with their husbands’ distortions of reality. Their husbands encouraged isolation from friends and family. “He tried to turn my family against me,” Bonnie pointed out. Annie stopped seeing her friends, too, when her husband asked her to. Charlotte was not only emotionally isolated, she was also geographically isolated when

she and her husband moved to the tiny Alaskan village where he was born. "New place, new state, no money—I became really trapped."

Annie didn't have many choices, either. "I felt like I had made a big mistake, but I didn't know how to get out of it." "I thought I would have to be the one to leave, and I had seven kids at home... I didn't have a lot of freedom to get away, or a lot of money, and a place to go....I just thought women's shelters were...really slummy kinds of places.... And I didn't know anybody, and I couldn't imagine how I was going to survive...plus I was afraid that...he'd find out where I was, and...talk me into coming back."

The two women who blamed themselves for the abuse thought that changing their own behavior would stop the violence. Bonnie tried to describe what was happening in her relationship.

You're trying so hard to make it work. If I just do this, then he'll understand, and he'll stop hitting me! You calculate every precise word you're going to say. He says he doesn't like this, so I'll stop doing it....You want to get out, but in another way you want to stay, because you think maybe you can work through it, and that somehow it will get a lot better...

Bonnie's husband Bill was usually very careful to make sure Bonnie believed that each argument, as well as the violence, was all her fault. But there was one time when he wasn't so careful. The couple planned to go for a walk with a female friend of Bill's, but first Bonnie had to go to the bathroom. When she came out, they had already left, so she shouted out to them to wait for her. "And he came back and just beat me right there, in

the middle of the road....What the hell was he hitting me for? That was the night I went to the shelter..."

This time she was sure that it wasn't her fault. That was the first time she had ever left him, even temporarily. She spent the night in a women's shelter, then went to stay with her parents for about a month. Bonnie was the only one of the three women in the study who had parents close by who could easily make room for her, and her relationship was by far the shortest, lasting only about two years.

Charlotte, like Bonnie, also felt that she could end the violence by changing her actions. She kept telling herself, "If I change, it won't happen again. I'm in control." Eventually she realized that she "couldn't do anything right...After you hear it long enough, you start wondering if he's got a point there, because you don't feel too good anyway, so you just think you did something wrong, so you never EVER think that you don't deserve it."

In addition to the acceptance of blame for the violence, another of the barriers created by the distortions of reality that Charlotte accepted from her partner was his threat of taking her children if she were to leave him—one of her major fears. Even though the girls were not his biological children, "he had me thoroughly convinced that he could get the girls. So I was always terrified of that."

Low self esteem, which was increased by the abuse, also made the women afraid that no other man would want them. Bonnie worried, "Am I pretty? Is anybody else going to like me?" Her lowered self esteem, confusion, and the fear she was going

insane all resulted from the constant emotional abuse, making it very difficult to plan for the future or to even think straight.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which affected both Bonnie and Charlotte, may have been another barrier between the women and their freedom. Bonnie described trying to deal with some of the symptoms after she left the relationship:

There were a few times people would make...sudden movements, and I'd go in the corner hiding, with my hands over my head....That was the hard part, ...dealing with all the flashbacks I would get. Last year was when most of my flashbacks stopped. And that took a lot of counseling.

Charlotte is glad she no longer has to "wake up sweating and screaming...", but she admitted, "I don't know if I'll ever...stop being afraid, or...stop having the little flashbacks....Maybe I left that abuse behind, but it's still in my head. And it doesn't take much to bring it back."

Another problem which resulted from the abuse was that the women seemed to have a loss of identity during the relationship, which may have been an additional barrier to their freedom. The abusers wielded so much control over the women's lives that they began to lose their individualities. Charlotte tried to explain it. "I didn't have my own identity—I was him! There was...no Charlotte anymore." Bonnie remembered who she was when she ran into an ex-boyfriend, who reminded her of all the things she used to do. "I actually remembered that I had a life before...; it reminded me that I was ME!"

"The Blinders Came Off"

None of the three women had a clear view of all the issues involved in her abusive relationship until the very end of the relationship. Bonnie and Charlotte accepted the distorted view of reality given to them by their husbands, and Annie was simply isolated, lacking the information she needed on restraining orders and women's shelters. As soon as they received the necessary information that gave them a clear picture of reality, each woman left the relationship within two weeks. In Bonnie's words, "The blinders came off."

Bonnie and Charlotte each remember receiving advice from professionals which seemed to have little impact at the time, but may have been subtle reinforcements leading to that final clear flash of reality when the blinders came off.

Once when Charlotte was in Anchorage, her girlfriend took her to the emergency room after a beating. "The doctor begged me not to go back to him. He gave me cab money to go anywhere else. 'I'm afraid for you....You're going to come back to us dead!' He scared me...I started thinking, 'Maybe this guy's got a point there.'"

One of the many times that Bonnie left Bill, a police officer told her, "'Well, it's good that you're leaving, because it...only gets worse from here.' And I didn't believe him at that point. But then when I went back into the relationship,...I started slowly realizing that maybe the police officer was right."

There were other professionals, however, who missed the opportunity to give a second opinion on what was happening in the relationship, possibly even adding to the barriers that prevented escape. Bonnie remembered a counselor she had talked to for her

depression during the relationship. Bonnie was angry “that she didn’t shake me and go, ‘Of course you’re depressed! You’re with some guy who is trying to kill you!’”

After Bonnie told her family about the abuse, she was able to get reality checks—another point of view—from her family. However, Bill always put doubt in her mind, telling her that they didn’t really care about her, so that she didn’t totally trust their opinions. One day, however, she ran into an ex-boyfriend, someone Bill had never met, so he couldn’t “color the picture of him.”

He started talking about all the things I used to do....And by then, I had...no life. I could barely function at a part-time job; I couldn’t do anything—I was...just a wreck! And it was then the blinders came off. I remembered who I was.... I swear to God, it was like the veils came off my eyes, ... and it was just completely an eye-opening experience. I don’t think I was in the relationship more than a couple of weeks after that.

I had this picture that Bill had made me believe who I was, so—the best way I can describe it was, I remembered who I was! And I...asked my ex-boyfriend, ‘You’re just recovering memories for me of who I used to be! Please, keep talking to me; keep talking to me!’

She asked her ex-boyfriend out to lunch about a week later. “‘What do you think of a lot of these things that are going on?’ And he leveled with me.” Then she called two other ex-boyfriends and said, “‘I need a reality check, please.’ And they gave it to me....That’s what really helped me—just having a reality check from somebody....They all seemed to agree, I mean, separately, that I was being manipulated and lied to.”

She ended the relationship immediately, but it took her a long time to gain the courage to file for a dissolution.

Annie's relationship was not as violent as Charlotte's or Bonnie's, but she felt just as trapped. "The more kids you have, the harder it is, and I really just felt stuck...."

I didn't know that I could get a restraining order and he would have to leave, and I could stay there with the kids....Even if the information would have been printed in the daily newspaper every day, I probably wouldn't have seen it, because we only got the newspaper on Sundays,...we didn't get t.v., and we only listened to the radio stations he listened to!

Strangely enough, Annie found the information she needed in jail. Annie and her husband were convicted of welfare fraud. He spent 13 months in jail first, and then she went to jail for 8 months. She discovered from the inmates that some of them had been in abusive relationships. "There were some people that said...there were ways to get out of that relationship....It made me feel like I wasn't the only one in the world who had gone through that, and that there was hope."

"Being in jail was more peaceful than being at home with him...I just knew I wasn't going to go back, but I had to get my kids." She learned about the symptoms of abuse and the steps that abusers follow. "It was getting worse and worse, and physical violence seemed to be coming up..."

She contacted the women's shelter in Anchorage and the women's shelter in Fairbanks. "Between the two of them, I had arrangements made so I'd have a place to go..." The counselor at the jail helped her to get a restraining order against her husband

two days before she got out of jail. She had to spend a few days at the shelter waiting for a hearing, but finally received custody of the children and the house.

Charlotte received the information she needed to gain her freedom in a very different way. Once she arrived in an Alaskan village, she had no resources and no one to help her see what was happening. "I couldn't hide out. I couldn't talk to anybody. I was so trapped in the village....! Her husband had convinced her that he would be given custody of the children. "I couldn't leave without the kids."

The beatings had gradually progressed from occurring every six months to occurring every week, and they were getting more severe all the time. She finally began to realize just how dangerous her position was. "I knew that I was either going to have to kill him or I was going to have to die. It was that bad. Right at the end..., when I went for help,...I couldn't get any....The chief of police wouldn't listen to me....I couldn't find anyone to listen to me or help me. Then I knew I was alone, really alone."

It wasn't a person who helped Charlotte see reality. It was a vision. "When you go to bed, and you're not quite asleep, and you think you're dreaming—it was like an instant flash! I saw that I was going to be buried out there in that horrible boneyard,...with those white crosses, on a bluff....I saw I was going to die in that horrible place! That's what did it for me!...It was God, warning me. I didn't have much time left. I had to get out..., and get out fast."

Three days later, her husband asked her an unusual question. "That's the last thing I expected out of him!" It was the morning after her last (and possibly worst) beating. "I couldn't even breathe! I had four broken ribs!" She was stunned to hear him asking her

“What in the hell do you want?”...I’d never had him ask me that.” She answered, “I want out! And I want out now!” To her amazement, he bought the plane tickets and gave them to her.

“I think he thought maybe I would have taken those tickets back and gone to the AC store and bought groceries with it, to be the good girl....I’m sure he was confident I wouldn’t go. Oh, man! It was the best feeling in the world, flying over that village, headed for Anchorage.” Freedom at last!

Each woman met her abuser at an unstable time in her life, making her more vulnerable to the perpetrator’s manipulations. Accepting a distorted view of reality kept the women in the relationships, but as soon as they had a true picture of reality, they were gone. They have not returned to their abusive husbands, and they all stated that they will never be in another abusive relationship.

Discussion

These narratives highlight and reinforce important conclusions advanced elsewhere in the literature on partner violence. In addition, several new findings emerged through the narratives of the women in this study. This section will describe convergences with the existing literature, and discuss new and emergent perspectives on partner violence not described elsewhere in the literature. Finally, this section will discuss limitations of this study, suggestions for future research, and clinical and policy implications.

Convergence with Existing Literature

The descriptions of partner violence in the existing literature are very similar to the stories of the three women who volunteered to participate in this study. The findings of this study highlight and clarify the shame and secrecy found by other researchers to have such a powerful role in keeping women in abusive relationships (Carlin, 1997; Walker, 1979). The shame is a result of a woman internalizing the perpetrator's derogatory attributions and blame for the violence (Carlin, 1997; Koss et al., 1994), described in this study as the acceptance of the abuser's distortion of reality.

Walker (1979) and Jasinski and Williams (1998) point out that economic dependence is another major factor preventing women from escaping abuse, and the women in this study were no exception. A universal theme of the narratives in this study was that women felt they could not leave without financial consequences; in fact for many of the women, lack of money meant that they had nowhere else to go at all.

The strong bonds in abusive relationships described by Walker (1979) was evident in these narratives. The two women who survived the most intense physical abuse, Bonnie and Charlotte, described patterns that matched Walker's Cycle Theory of Violence (1979), with a honeymoon period following the physical explosion. Annie, who was more verbally than physically abused, parallels Walker's findings (1984) showing that some abusive relationships may have only one physical assault, in addition to other forms of abuse.

Koss et al. (1994) found that the biggest risk marker for being involved in partner violence is witnessing partner violence as a child. Charlotte was the only woman in this

study who witnessed violence as a child, and she remained in the most intensely violent relationship for the longest amount of time.

The findings from this study indicate that the violence in the relationships was intended to control or dominate the women, similar to the findings of Koss et al. (1994). This violence both dominated and led to significant psychological cost to the women. Bonnie and Charlotte, who were victims of the most severe violence, were both diagnosed with PTSD, congruent with the findings of Barnette and LaViolette (1993). Both Bonnie and Charlotte had experience with society's seeming indifference to partner violence, described by Walker (1979) and Koss et al. (1994), as they were both unable to persuade police to arrest the perpetrators.

Davis (1999) discovered that giving up parts of self after relentless abuse make abused women vulnerable to believing that they are as worthless as their abusers insist. The loss of self described by Carlin (1997), Mills (1985) and Wuest and Merrit-Gray (2002) is strikingly similar to the words of the two women who were most severely abused, Bonnie and Charlotte. Charlotte explained that she had lost her identity toward the end of the relationship, and Bonnie said she was able to escape the abuse when she remembered who she was.

Davis (2002) described intuition as having the biggest impact on immediate escape, which may be related to the way Charlotte's vision enabled her to escape the abuse.

New and Emergent Perspectives on Partner Violence

Although many of the findings of this study reinforce important research that has already been done, some of the findings may offer additional perspective on the complex process of an abusive relationship.

Two of the women were in chaotic, unstable periods when they met their abusers, and the woman who witnessed partner violence as a child was also fairly recently out of a very chaotic time in her life. All three of the women were unsure of themselves, looking for answers, and they all saw their new partners as having all the answers they needed.

One of the most important issues in abusive relationships is the issue of shame—the one issue that most of society has failed to understand. This study demonstrates how the shame these women felt was caused by verbal abuse, and also offers another clarifying insight, the fact that an abused woman may see reality in an entirely different way.

These women believed that they were responsible for the violence because they believed that their own mistakes had so stressed their husbands that they had finally lost all control and succumbed to violence. There were many other distortions in reality besides the self blame; Bonnie's husband persuaded her to believe that she had a sleeping disorder, and that she had tried to stab him in her sleep. Charlotte believed her husband when he told her he could legally take her children if she left, even though he was not their biological father.

Through the intense control exerted over every portion of their lives, the women began to lose their identities, accepting their partners' interpretations of the world. They

considered the verbal abuse as truth, internalizing the derogatory attributions. All these distortions of reality weakened the women's ability to care for and protect themselves, becoming a very effective means of locking each woman in place.

Another important finding of this study was the immediacy with which the women left the relationship as soon as they gained a new perspective—a clear view of reality. The nature of this clear view varied by the individual. For Bonnie, it took the form of rediscovery of a “lost self” as a result of a conversation with a former boyfriend. She ended her relationship two weeks later. Annie discovered she could get a restraining order against her husband, thereby remaining with her children in her own home. She never went back to her husband. Finally, Charlotte had a vision of her impending death if she remained with her violent partner; she left three days later. Once this clear view was gained, it was remarkable how quickly each woman moved, after years of being stuck in a cyclical pattern of abuse.

Limitations of Current Study

It is important to note that, though a number of the perspectives that arose from this study may generalize to other women, there are important limitations to the generalizability of interpretations from the data in this study. One of the most obvious limitations of this study is the small sample, with all three women residing in the same geographical location, Alaska. Although one of the relationships took place entirely in Illinois, all the women in the study eventually found their way to Alaska.

One very important limitation could be the historical implications resulting from the different ages of the women. The youngest woman, Bonnie, may have been able to

benefit from the many years that women's issues had been in the forefront of social change. She was very active in women's causes before she met her abuser, and was already familiar with some of the basic issues of partner violence. Her knowledge of women's issues may have helped her to end her relationship sooner.

The two older women may have been raised in more of a traditional atmosphere. They both married when they were teenagers, so by the time the country's consciousness was beginning to be raised on women's issues, it may be that these women were already trying out the role expectations which had previously been stamped in their minds.

Ethnicity and culture is another limitation of this study. Spousal role expectations, communication patterns, and family patterns may all vary widely according to ethnicity and culture. Although all the women visibly appeared to be European-Americans, careful interviewing regarding ethnicity or culture was not done.

These women did not return to their husbands or to any other abusive relationship by the end of this study, but a longitudinal study would be the only way to prove that they would never allow themselves to be abused again.

It may be important to remember that the two women who were most violently abused were telling their stories retrospectively, years after they had ended their relationships. There is the possibility that their memories were not accurate. On the other hand, after counseling and the passing of time to ease the trauma, these two women may have been better able to recount physical details as well as emotional motivations and effects in a more objective way. Their narratives were definitely longer and more detailed than the woman who had more recently ended her relationship.

Suggestions for Future Research

Suggestions for future research include more studies, with larger samples, on abused women who have not witnessed partner abuse in childhood. What was going on in their lives when they became involved in abusive relationships? What was the emotional setting? Was it an unstable time, full of chaos or instability? Research on different age cohorts would supply much needed answers, as well as research on abused women from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. More research is needed on the distortion of reality in abusive relationships and especially on the methods which are successful in removing those distortions and enabling women to see a clear view of reality. We need to know more about the process of escape—all the things that are in place when the turning point finally comes, the final decision to leave. Are economics involved, or just a place to which they can run? Is there a support group in place? Are their children making it easier or more crucial to leave? Have professionals played a role along the way? Is there a series of seemingly small events that gradually lead the way to that final turning point?

Clinical and Policy Implications

We continue to need more women's shelters, places where women can go to escape immediate danger, where they have time to rest and a chance to think clearly. Alaska needs to be sure that women in small villages also have a means to escape abuse, where the only road to freedom may be in an airplane.

It is important to note that professionals who only see a woman for a few minutes, like doctors and police, may still be able to provide valuable input, even though the final

effects may not be seen for years. Or they may add to the already formidable barriers that women must face when trying to escape abuse.

Toward the end of Bonnie's relationship, one beating required a trip to the emergency room, and she tried unsuccessfully to have her husband arrested. The police would not arrest him because he said that Bonnie had been the attacker. If the police and the hospital personnel who treated Bonnie had been properly trained, they may have been able to recognize Bonnie's wounds, from outer elbow to wrist, as defensive wounds. If the counselors from whom Bonnie sought help had been properly trained, they might have been able to recognize the symptoms of a violent relationship even if she had been too ashamed to mention the violence.

The prevalence and the power of this kind of violence demands that any kind of professional who regularly deals with people on a personal basis must have training in the basic issues involved in partner violence, especially those who regularly work with the effects of partner violence.

Conclusion

In order to learn how women are able to gain freedom from abuse, it may be necessary to learn how women meet and become bonded to abusers, as well as the barriers they face in escaping the abuse. The women in this study met their abusers in chaotic, unstable times of their lives, times when they were looking for answers. Each woman was convinced that her "Prince Charming" had all the answers.

Through isolation and a steadily increasing stream of verbal and emotional abuse, the abusers were able to confuse the women in this study and distort their views of

reality. They convinced most of the women that they had caused the violence themselves, which made them too ashamed to tell anyone about it.

This distorted view of reality led the women to believe that if they improved themselves, their marriage problems could be worked out. This was a major barrier to escaping from the abuse. Lowered self esteem, loss of identity, PTSD, and economic problems, as well as society's indifference when the women finally tried to seek help, all helped to keep them locked in the relationships.

A clearly defined event enabled each woman to discover a clear view of reality, free of distortions, and the effect was immediate escape from the abuse. The most positive message to come out of these narratives is just how quickly, once a clear view emerged, that each of the women was able to take her steps to freedom.

Partner violence has been allowed to continue for so long because of the silence surrounding it. Now that it has been brought into the light of day as a subject for scientific study, we must continue to listen to the words of the women who have lived these experiences, and we must be relentless in our pursuit of methods which will at last end ten centuries of assault on women. One of the most important means toward that goal may be the thorough education of every adult and every adolescent on the issues involved in partner violence, so that abused women never again have to hear, "Why didn't you just leave?"

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Appendix A

Escaping Abuse

Researcher – Participant Agreement

Name of Participant _____

Name of Researcher: Sandra Armstrong, candidate for Master's degree in Community Psychology at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, phone 457-4816

Description of Research

An Exploration of Women's Process in Finding Freedom from Abuse

The purpose of this research study is to increase understanding of women's experiences in leaving abuse behind, for the ultimate goal of helping to improve the lives of other women who live with abusive partners. Participants will work together with the researcher and will be fully involved in the research process. Input, feedback and suggestions for new directions are encouraged.

Details of Research

Some potential benefits for you if you decide to participate in this research study include: 1) focusing on your experiences in a way you may not have done previously, which may lead to greater self-understanding; and 2) an opportunity to be heard and to contribute to a greater understanding of women's experiences in ending abuse.

Any program in which you have been involved, or any treatment you may be currently receiving here, will not be affected in any way, whether you decide to participate in this research or not.

Some considerations for you in deciding to participate in this study are the time, energy and effort required for collaborative research. As this research is exploring sensitive experiences, it is also possible that you may experience emotions, or recall memories which create difficulties for you. If this occurs during interviews, you may want to take a break during the interview, or stop the interview, and you are encouraged to do so at any time. You may talk to me anytime, in person or on the phone, if you need to talk about feelings that have come up for you during interviews, or you may talk with an advocate at the Interior Alaska Center for Non-violent Living (the Center).

You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, without penalty. Your participation in this research may be terminated at any time either by you or by the researcher, if it becomes evident that you no longer have the ability or the desire to continue to reflect on and explore the meanings of your experiences. You are welcome to discuss any expectations or concerns about any part of the research process. If you prefer, questions about your rights as a research subject may be directed to the chairperson of the Internal Review Board at UAF, phone 474-7800, address P.O. Box 757560, Fairbanks 99775-7560, e-mail fyori@uaf.edu. Other types of questions or issues may be directed to the research supervisor Jim Allen, phone 474-6132, e-mail ffjra@uaf.edu.

If you agree to be part of this research study, you will be asked to meet with me for two interviews, which will take place over a period of two to four weeks, and a

follow-up meeting. The interviews will take place at the Center or another place of your choosing where you feel safe and comfortable. Each interview will be about one to two hours long, and will be audio-taped to ensure an accurate account of what is said. If you feel you need more time to fully cover all the issues, it will be provided. Transcripts of interviews will be provided for you to read. This process may result in greater awareness and insight into your own experiences.

You will have the opportunity to check the accuracy and completeness of my understanding of your experiences and to collaborate in analyzing the material. A final follow-up meeting will be scheduled about four to six weeks after the interviews so that you may see and evaluate the final results of the study.

In the depiction of your story and experiences, your real name will not be used, nor will any details of your experiences which you feel may help to identify you. Code numbers will be used in place of names to identify tapes and transcripts. Confidentiality will be strictly maintained at all times. Although your identity will not be revealed, your contribution to our collaborative work will be acknowledged in the study.

Data from taped interviews will be stored in locked files on the UAF campus, and will be used for this research purpose only. Audio-tapes will be erased and then destroyed upon completion of the study.

If you understand the above conditions and voluntarily agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. Your signature gives permission to Sandra Armstrong to use the information you provide in the interviews for her Master's thesis and any future report or publications pertaining to this study. You will receive a copy of this agreement.

Co-Researcher _____ Date _____

Witness _____ Date _____

The signature of any pregnant participant must be witnessed.

As the Researcher, I agree to abide by the above conditions, and to be responsible for ensuring that the contents of all interviews are kept confidential.

Researcher _____ Date _____

Your interest and participation are greatly appreciated. I value the unique contribution that you can make to this study, and I look forward to our meetings.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW #1

Initially we will spend some time discussing the collaborative nature of this research process, the development of my interest in exploring this topic, the purpose of the research, and our expectations of each other in this process. We will also discuss any potential difficulties for the co-researcher in this exploration of sensitive issues and experiences, and establish what we can do to make the process safe and comfortable for her. She will be given a form to fill out on demographics and family of origin before the verbal questioning starts.

1. Let's start out today by looking back at what the relationship was like. Can you describe what the nature of your relationship with your partner was like, and what abuse occurred?
 - Probes: -can you describe some abusive incidents? (Clarify if these included physical force, forced or unwanted sex, emotional and/or other abuse).
 - how did you understand the abuse, and what was happening?
 - how did you react?
 - how do you think the abuse affected you?
 - did the relationship/abuse affect how you felt about yourself?
 - what was your life like before you met your partner? How did you feel about yourself then? What were your relationships like? Friends? Family?

2. Tell me about your reasons for staying in the abusive situation.
 - Probes: -what were your expectations of the relationship?
 - were there fears or beliefs that kept you there?
 - what were some of the practical barriers (housing, income, etc.)
 - were there concerns about the children?
 - did your reasons for staying change over time?
 - what were your major struggles, concerns or fears?
3. We have explored a lot of your experiences (give brief summary). Do you have any other thoughts or feelings to add before we finish up for today?
4. What was the interview process like for you? How are you feeling?

After you leave today, if you have any further thoughts on what we have talked about, it may be helpful to jot them down so we can talk about them at our next meeting. (Make arrangements for delivery of transcripts and set a time for the next meeting).

INTERVIEW #2

Initially we will discuss any further thoughts or feelings about the issues covered in the last interview. The co-researcher will be invited to share her comments, thoughts and feelings coming from reading the transcript of the interview. Next the co-researchers will review, discuss and evaluate any coding that has been done for purposes of analysis.

The focus of our meeting today is to explore what your experiences have been in coming to the decision to end the abuse, and what factors contributed to that decision.

You are the expert on this, and I am hoping to learn more about what it was like for you, and what was significant for you, by hearing what you have to say.

1. How did you come to the decision to leave your home and come to the Center?

- Probes: I'd like you to go back to times when you were considering how to put an end to the abuse, times when you started to think seriously about leaving, as well as the more recent time of actually leaving your home.
- were there certain events or changes in your life that influenced your thoughts or feelings in terms of leaving? How did that influence you? What meaning did that have for you?
- were there specific turning points?
- what were the most important factors leading up to your decision? How were they significant?
- what stands out for you as having helped you in coming to this decision?
- can you describe how your perception of, and feelings about, the relationship, your partner, and the abuse, may have changed during this time?

2. Were there difficulties for you in deciding to put an end to the abuse?

- Probes: -what were your major struggles, concerns and fears?
- was there a sense of loss in thinking of leaving your home and coming to the Center?

- how did you approach, and deal with, these difficulties/fears?
 - how did you come to leave, in the face of these fears/difficulties?
3. Did any relationships or connections with other people influence your decision to leave the abuse behind?
- Probes: what have friendships and family relationships been like for you during this time?
 - did others know about the abuse in the relationship? How did they respond?
 - did you reach out to social supports in the community? What was that like for you?
 - did anyone in particular influence you in your decision?
4. I am interested in how you make sense of your experiences in the relationship and your decision to leave the abuse. Given what you have talked about in these interviews, what you have said about your life, the relationship, the abuse, and your decision to end the abuse, how do you understand what has happened?
- Probes: (draw on data from previous interviews to probe meaning-making).
 - how do you feel about moving out of your home in order to end the abuse?
 - when you think about your prior reasons for staying, why were they no longer enough to keep you there? What became more important?
 - how do you feel about the changes in your life?
 - how do you see yourself now? How do you feel about yourself?
 - has leaving the abuse behind affected how you feel about yourself, your sense of self?

- describe where your life is now. Do things seem to make sense ?
 - what kinds of things feel good in your life now?
 - what are your relationships like?
 - what are your main concerns?
 - do you see yourself changing in the future? Where do you see yourself going in the future?
5. Is there anything else you would like to add? If you have further thoughts later that you think it is important for me to know, just give me a call. We can set up another meeting if necessary.
6. What has your experience of the interview process been like today? How are you feeling?

I will let you know when my analysis is finished, and we will meet again so you can evaluate the results. (Make arrangements for delivery of transcript).

APPENDIX C

Background Information

1. How many children do you have living with you? What are their ages?
2. Describe any special needs child/children.
3. How many years have you been in your present/recent relationship?
4. How old were you when you started living with your present/recent partner?
5. How many times have you left in the past?
6. How long have you stayed at the Center?
7. Have you had other abusive relationships?
8. How many people were there in your family of origin (include parents, sisters, brothers)?
9. Did your parents stay together or did they separate or divorce?
10. Did you witness your father abusing your mother?
11. Did your spouse/partner witness his father abusing his mother?
12. Are you religious? What church do you attend?
13. How many years of work experience do you have?
14. What is the highest education level you have finished?
15. Is there substance abuse in your past?
16. Does your spouse/partner have substance abuse in his present/past?
17. Was there substance abuse in your family of origin?
18. What was your family income before you moved to the Center?
19. What is your personal income at present?

APPENDIX D

Agency Consent Form

Researcher: Sandra Armstrong, candidate for Master's degree in Community Psychology at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, phone 457-4816

Research Supervisor: Jim Allen, phone 474-6132

I propose to conduct a study with three members of the client population from this agency. My interest is in exploring women's process in gaining freedom from abuse. The purpose of this study is to explore, describe, and increase understanding of how women put an end to abuse. Interviews for this study will be conducted during the winter of 2001-2002. I will be asking the research participants to describe their experiences and the meanings that they held for them.

There is a certain risk for retraumatization while recalling memories of abuse, and the participants may feel a need to speak with an advocate during the research process. Having previously interacted with many victims of violent partners in my professional life as well as in my personal life, I am very sensitive to the issues involved. Emotional issues that arise during the interviews may be dealt with at that time, with the women being free to take breaks or end the session—even to withdraw entirely from the study, without penalty.

The research methodology I have chosen is a significant aspect of this study. I will be using a qualitative approach, which will give full voice to the women, who are considered to be the experts in their own experiences. My intention is to make the research process as equitable as possible for the participants by utilizing a collaborative

approach. This approach can potentially provide a more meaningful and empowering experience for the participants, and rich data for the research study. I will be conducting two audio-taped interviews over a period of about one or two weeks, each interview one to two hours long, with each of three research participants. If they feel the need for more interview time to cover all the issues, it will be provided.

The Center is asked to provide my phone number to volunteers who match the criteria below and who express interest in participating in this research. These potential participants will contact the researcher by telephone. Participation in the study will be strictly voluntary, and participants will be free to withdraw at any time. Either the researcher or the participant may terminate the interviews if it becomes evident that the participant no longer has the desire or the ability to reflect on and explore experiences of abuse.

Participants will be current or former clients of the program who meet the following criteria: Euro-American women between the ages of 21 and 40 who were in a relationship for at least five years in which abuse occurred and who have left the abuse not more than 6 months previously, with an average yearly family income (before the relationship ended) of \$30,000 or less, and who have the ability and the willingness to reflect, identify and explore meanings and significant aspects of their experiences. The study will not include women with psychotic disorders, active suicidality (having a specific plan for suicide) or active substance abuse within the previous six months (if there is substance abuse within the previous year, further screening may be necessary to assess stability).

As the methodology of the study is qualitative in nature, there may be some minor modification to how the research is carried out as the study progresses. Researcher – Co-Researcher Agreement forms, outlining the particulars of the research process, will be signed by the researcher and participants. Confidentiality will be strictly maintained at all times. Code numbers will be used in place of participants' names on tapes and transcripts to protect identities. Data from interviews will be stored in the researcher's personal, locked files while being used, then in locked files on the UAF campus, and will be used for this research purpose only. When it is no longer necessary to store data, it will be disposed of in a manner maintaining confidentiality.

I have read and understood the terms of the proposed research study, and I give my consent for Sandra Armstrong to conduct this research at this agency.

_____ Executive Director _____ Date

_____ Clinical Supervisor _____ Date

I agree to abide by the terms as presented above.

_____ Researcher _____ Date

Appendix E

Exploring Participant's Experience of the Research Process

How you have been feeling about the interviews, and the research process in general, is important. I'd like to take a few minutes to hear about your experience of being involved in this study. a) How has the experience of the interviews, and the entire research process, affected you? b) How were you feeling throughout the interviews?

1. Did you feel free to talk about your thoughts and feelings and about what you thought was important?
2. Do you have any thoughts or feelings about the collaborative approach to this study? What did it feel like to work together on this research?
3. Do you have any thoughts or feelings on how collaborating in this research process may have contributed to how you make sense of your experience of choosing to end the abuse?
4. What do you think was the purpose of the interviews?
5. How did you experience me during the interviews?
6. Why did you agree to participate in this research? How do you feel about having participated? What, if anything, do you feel you have gained by participating?
7. Do you feel you need help in dealing with emotions which have come up as a result of the research process?